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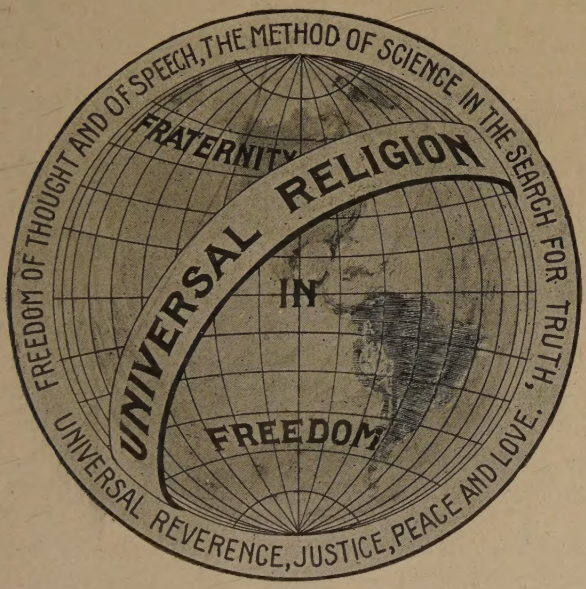

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SAMUEL COLLYER (Treas.) ALICE C. VANRUYPER

EDITOR

ALFRED W. MARTIN, 409 NORTH E ST., TACOMA.

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WHY I LEFT THE UNITARIAN DENOMINATION.

A LETTER ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT AND DIRECTORS OF THE AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION.

I entered the ministry of the Unitarian Church some ten years ago in the belief that this church upheld and defended a *continuous* revelation in contradistinction to a *finished* revelation which is the chief corner-stone of the evangelical churches. This belief of mine was based partly on information gathered from conversation with leading Unitarian ministers and professors, but also on the published utterances of eminent men who have been generally regarded as the "fathers" of Unitarianism in America. In Channing's works, for example, I read about the dignity and the illimitable possibilities of human nature. On almost every page it was written that man had powers large and ample—the power to produce Bibles, to imitate Jesus, and even to imitate God. Parker, also, championed the cause of a continuous revelation by preaching the incompleteness and imperfection of established beliefs and institutions. The counsel he gave to his age as well as to ours was "to avoid the Roman error—not count a church infallible; the German error—not worship a book; the mistake of the whole Christian sect who take Jesus of Nazareth for a finality—a master, not servant, sacrificing the development of the race to reverence for one great, lofty man." And Emerson spoke and wrote to the end of his dying days about man's duty to establish immediate relations with the living God, "to enjoy an original relation to the universe, to have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition; and to have a religion of revelation to us and not a history of theirs." Such inspiring words as these—and they might be multiplied indefinitely—exerted a powerful influence over my mind, and were among the chief causes that led me into the ministry of the Unitarian Church, a church in which I had hoped to find the cause of a continuous revelation consistently and jealously guarded.

But I had not been long in the active ministry of the Unitarian Church before I discovered therein strong evangelical ten-

dencies making for a finished revelation. I often heard it said that although the Bible was not infallible, infallibility was in it —that although it was not the word of God, it contained the word of God; and that although Jesus was not infallible, infallibility was in him—that although he was not God, but man, he was the ideal and perfect man, the absolute religious leader of mankind. Such declarations as these, coming as many of them did from men of commanding influence in the Unitarian Church, naturally led me to make a wider and more thorough study of the history of the Unitarian movement in America. And as I was so surprised to find men in the active Unitarian ministry holding evangelical views on so fundamental a matter as the nature and limits of revelation, I gave particular attention to that point.

I did not have to read very far into the contemporary literature of the Unitarian movement before I discovered that the movement had in it at its very beginning those who strenuously opposed recognizing any distinction between Unitarianism and Orthodoxy. And some prominent men in the orthodox party went so far as to accuse those early Unitarians of concealing their peculiar views. "They kept a cautious reserve," one man wrote, so that neither from their sermons, their prayers, nor their private conversation their real sentiments could be discovered."

And when Dr. Channing finally dared to come out in his Baltimore sermon and declare the "distinguishing opinions" of the Unitarians, Leonard Wood of Andover Theological Seminary expressed great surprise at so unprecedented an act. In his series of letters addressed to the Unitarians on the occasion of that Baltimore sermon, Dr. Wood said that hitherto the Unitarians had repeatedly denied that any essential difference existed between themselves and the Orthodox, and that now he was deeply perplexed as to what Channing meant by such an innovation. But, if we are to believe Dr. Ellis, the acomplished historian of the "Half Century Controversy," the opposition to any distinct Unitarian movement continued for many decades in spite of Channing's declaration of differences. Even in the '50s, at the time of Dr. Ellis's writing, those with evangelical leanings outnumbered the faithful ten to one—a sad commentary on the reluctance with

which human beings accept the responsibilities the Infinite forces upon them.

The founding of the American Unitarian Association in the '20s and of the National Conference in the '60s did much to define and individualize the Unitarian movement, and one might have reasonably expected that these organizations would at last free the Unitarian Church from any admixture of dogmatic absolutism. But—regretfully I cannot but believe—the facts do not seem to encourage us in this hope. For no sooner had organized Unitarianism adopted a distinct name for itself than efforts were set on foot to empty the name of any distinctive meaning. When Theodore Parker—than whom no one better understood the inner genius of religious freedom—was storming the fortresses of absolutism in Boston and threatening the very citadel of orthodoxy, the American Unitarian Association became very much alarmed about itself and its standing in the community—for Parker at that time was generally regarded as a Unitarian. And to relieve themselves from the "embarrassments with which they as a body were then unjustly entangled by the peculiarities of the few," this association took special pains to proclaim publicly that *their* belief was a "belief in the divinity of the mission of the son of God; in Christianity as a special divine revelation, supernaturally communicated and authenticated to mankind; in the Bible as a voice from heaven, an authority higher than man's on the question of man's duty and destiny." Then again, in '65 and '66, the National Conference took the side of absolutism and insisted on affirming and reaffirming its allegiance to the "Lord Jesus Christ," thereby excluding from its sympathy and fellowship that noble company of prophets and saints who founded the Free Religious Association. And finally, in 1894, after making several attempts to harmonize the belief in Jesus' absolute spiritual supremacy with the principle of a continuous revelation so beautifully written about and spoken about by Channing, Parker, and Emerson, this conference also pledged itself "to accept the religion of Jesus, holding in accordance with his teachings that practical religion is summed up in love to God and love to man."

And, now, I need scarcely add that I have been deeply dis-

appointed in thus learning that the Unitarianism of today—which may not be improperly described as ecclesiastical Unitarianism—does not seem to represent that profounder Unitarianism of Channing, Parker, and Emerson, which, in spite of much opposition, differentiated itself from orthodoxy at the beginning of the century just closed. So finding myself, as I now do, represented as one of the ministers who have pledged themselves to "accept the religion of Jesus," the seriously practical question arises whether I can any longer truthfully take such a pledge. It goes without saying that if I can not take it truthfully I ought not to take it at all; and, on the other hand, if I *can* take it truthfully I ought to take it, for there should be no prejudices against pledges as such. To take a pledge is to take a stand, and to take a truthful pledge is to take a stand for truth.

Let me say then, immediately, that a truthful pledge should be an unambiguous pledge, and that he who pledges himself to accept the religion of Jesus should guard himself against all reasonable suspicion that his motive is to deceive. Rev. John W. Chadwick paid a noble tribute to this moral law after the National Conference voted in 1865 to accept the "Lord Jesus Christ." In a sermon preached at Brooklyn immediately following that first conference he informed his congregation that they had a right to know he had voted against admitting that phrase into the constitution of a Unitarian organization and for the following reasons: "Not but in a certain sense I can call Jesus Lord; not but in a certain sense I can call him Christ; but it would not be, in either case, the same in which the churches of the past have called him by these names; and I much prefer to use such words as can have but one meaning. And, moreover, since not a single minister or delegate in the convention could use the words in that sense in which they are employed in the whole church beside, I fancy there was something dishonest in the use we made of them. But if we did not sin we surely did mistake. For if the older sects are not deceived into a belief that we agree with them, which would be manifestly false, what does the expression profit us? It was for their sakes we adopted it. Will they think any better of us when they know that we have put them off with words which they ac-

cept, reserving for ourselves a meaning which they despise?" These are the finest words I have ever read on the commandment "thou shalt not be ambiguous," and I recall them naturally here as the pledge to "accept the religion of Jesus" seems to me to be open to the same charge of ambiguity so frankly set forth by Chadwick in 1865. For the "churches of the past" the "older sects" continue to speak of "accepting Jesus." 'Tis true they accept him as Lord and Christ, as Savior and Redeemer, as the propitiation and atonement for sins, but they accept him and they accept his religion. So I feel that Chadwick's objection to the Unitarian use of the phrase "Lord Jesus Christ" holds good against the Unitarian use of the phrase "accept the religion of Jesus." The meaning of the latter cannot be unambiguous. The older sects may again be put off with words they accept, but with a meaning they despise.

Nevertheless,I have waived this extremely weighty moral objection and have tried to accept the modern statement of Unitarianism. I have sought for some honest way of holding that religion is "summed up in love to God and love to man?" The statement is simple, but is it not too simple? Is it not much simpler than the reality for which it is meant to stand? Religion may be rooted in feeling, but feeling is a very broad term, covering every phase of our personal, conscious life, the intellect and the will as well as the emotions. There are intellectual feelings and volitional feelings as well as emotional feelings. And love is but one of the many emotions. So it would be too obviously a sin of "over-simplification" to identify the whole of religion with a single feeling of the emotional order only. But my main difficulty is not with the size of the "*sum.*" We have had "*sums*" of all sizes, as Schaff's "Creeds of Christendom" will testify, and they all have been very unsatisfactory. And it was a mistake to suppose that dogmatism could be got rid of by making the creeds small. The popularity of the *summa* of St. Thomas Aquinas argues for large creeds. The root of the difficulty lies in the assumption that any creed, large or small, can be given of religion. And in making such an assumption the Unitarians have classed themselves with all the Christian sects whose most salient trait has

been their love of sums and finished revelations, of infallible books and infallible men. In affirming as it does that there is a sense in which Jesus is to be accepted as the whole of religion the Unitarian creed only perpetuates the old spirit of absolutism which has made of Jesus such an impossible monstrosity, calling him first "Deity," then the "only begotten son of God," and finally "the perfect, complete, ideal man." And it is this absolutism assumed in all the creeds which makes them unacceptable to those who love real freedom and want a world in which freedom and growth and progress can be real rather than apparent and illusory. If "love to God and love to man," or anything else, is the "whole of it," then why have any more of it? Why a future? Why more experience, more facts, more problems, more aspirations, more ideals, more life? If we have the whole of it then let the curtain fall and the weary be at rest. The reply is, we have not the whole of it—not even in love to God and love to man. The future is full of unrealized possibilities, each one as fundamental and important as those already made flesh. And, feeling so keenly the importance of this world-view, as it may be called, I could not think of accepting love to God and love to man as the whole of the law and the prophets.

Without doubt love is a part of religion, and as a part I heartily accept it, but it surely cannot be the "sum," the alpha and the omega of religion. No summing up of the content of practical religion can be even approximately adequate unless it states not only the duty of love to God and man, but also the need of a true intelligence or *wisdom* to guide that love, and also a worthy *end* which the love shall have as its *goal.*

In justice to Jesus, however, it ought to be said in this connection that there are grave doubts as to whether Jesus ever meant to sum up religion in love to God and love to man. Even on the supposition that the gospels are the authentic sources of his biography it would be difficult to reach such an unqualified conclusion. But when we reflect that the authenticity of the gospels is under a cloud of honest doubt and that we probably can never know the exact facts about his life, the injustice of quoting Jesus as an authority on so grave a matter becomes still more apparent.

And now to return to the practical question whether I ought to represent myself as holding that religion is summed up in love to God and love to man, I do not see how I can honestly do so. I do not believe that love to God and love to man sums up religion, and I doubt if Jesus believed it. So how can I say before the whole world that I accept what I do not believe and what I doubt if Jesus believed. I ought not to misrepresent my own belief, nor ought I to conceal it; and I must not misrepresent the belief of another. The same reason, then, which forced our forefathers to discard so many of the older creeds forces me to discard this creed.

Finally, that my meaning may not be misunderstood, let me say that my attitude involves certain definite practical consequences of a very serious nature. Although I believe I am still true to the profounder Unitarianism of the fathers, the organic law of the Unitarian denomination as now expressed in the constitution of the National Conference deprives me of the right to the Unitarian name. For that law states explicitly that all Unitarian churches hold with Jesus that religion is summed up in love to God and love to man. So long, then, as the word Unitarian continues to stand for *this* belief my name must be excluded from the list of Unitarian ministers. Furthermore, the same law deprives me of the right to be a candidate for any Unitarian pulpit. As every such pulpit is now pledged to uphold the constitution of the conference it *would* not and it *should* not extend a call to any minister who does not believe the fundamental law of that constitution. And no minister could honorably accept a call to any Unitarian pulpit who did not "accept the religion of Jesus, holding in accordance with his teachings that practical religion is summed up in love to God and love to man."

These are very serious consequences for me, as the advantages to be gained by being represented as a Unitarian are very great, and hardships are likely to come to one who is deprived of the prestige of that name. And I must confess that in thinking over the losses which may come to me by giving up the name, I have been led to wonder whether I could not still retain the name on the ground that the National Conference Constitution says: "We

cordially invite to our working fellowship any who, while differing from us in belief, are in general sympathy with our spirit and our practical aims.'' But after thinking it all over carefully I have concluded that such a course would give a bad meaning to the purpose which the conference had in mind in extending such an invitation. As I am unwilling to believe that the Unitarians wish men to misrepresent their beliefs I can not construe this invitation to mean that the conference encourages those who do not accept the Unitarian faith to take the Unitarian name and to become pastors of Unitarian churches. The Unitarians have been conspicuous in condemning this species of dishonesty in other denominations, and it is not likely that they would thus deliberately encourage misrepresentation of religious beliefs. So in surrendering the privilege of having my name included in the list of Unitarian ministers I feel that I am carrying out the real purpose of the constitution of the National Conference and thereby averting the guilt of intellectual dishonesty. I feel also that disloyalty to what one sincerely believes in his own heart is more to be feared than poverty, and that our secret beliefs are given to us to be proclaimed and not to be concealed and cherished in private. Consoled by such thoughts as these I accept the consequences of my faith, trusting that the God who gave me the heart to feel this faith will provide some way to keep it beating a little while longer. Into His hands I commit my future. Very cordially yours,

J. W. Roberts.

Boston, Sept. 1, 1903.

THE ATTITUDE OF JEWS TOWARD JESUS.

BY RABBI CHARLES FLEISCHER.

The attitude of Jews toward Jesus is of three kinds—that of hatred, that of indifference, and that of growing appreciation. The attitude of hatred can easily be understood when we realize that, for centuries now, the name of Jesus has been the symbol of all the sufferings the Jews have experienced at the hands of those who followed him—at a distance. Hatred is not to be justified by hatred, but we need not wonder that most Jews are unable to forget the persecution and ostracism which they have endured and still endure at the hands of the distant "followers" of Jesus. This attitude, however, represents not merely resentment and bigotry but also an uncompromising adherence to pure monotheism.

The second attitude, that of indifference, characterizes those Jews who have ceased to resent "Christian" intolerance, and yet do not feel called upon to examine the claims of Jesus. The Jews are not hero-worshipers, and therefore are not disposed to single out Jesus, or any other moral hero, as the one human exemplar, teacher or inspirer. On the other hand, many Jews, and usually these are of the progressive type, are beginning to examine, with an increasing interest and a growing appreciation the career and the character of this most influential of Jewish teachers, this loving and lovable Rabbi Jesus of Nazareth.

No zealous believer in the deity of Jesus, who imagines that all the world will inevitably some day share that belief with him, needs delude himself with the notion that this growing appreciation of Jesus on the part of some Jews means that they are coming to Christ. There is no likelihood of that consummation, since ages of insistence upon unmixed monotheism have so shaped the Jewish mind that it is psychologically incapable of accepting Jesus as God, or as Son of God, or as part of God, or as expression of God in any sense other than that in which all human beings may be regarded as a divine expression. Christians are more noticeably tending to give up the belief in the deity of Jesus than even a few Jews tend to accept his helpful humanity.

For my part, I believe that Jews act unwisely in this matter. Whatever Jesus was he was a Jew, and I am willing not only that Jews shall receive credit for him, but also that in proportion to the intrinsic merit of his life and teachings we shall find further proof of the religious genius of the Jew. For one, I am glad to recognize the greatness of this human seer who chanced to be a Jew, and to acknowledge the singular beauty of his personality. Without attempting to estimate the rank of Jesus among Jewish prophets or universal seers, I would say that his uniqueness lies in his intense humanity, his sense of close relationship and communion with the divine, and his transparent bodying forth of that consciousness by his stimulating precepts and his inspiring example.

LETTER TO TACOMA TRUSTEES.

SEATTLE, Sept.. 20, 1903.

To the Board of Trustees of the First Free Church of Tacoma, Tacoma, Washington:

Gentlemen—We, the Trustees of the Society for Universal Religion of Seattle, deem it but an act of duty and neighborly courtesy to apprise you of our action in having today extended to Mr. Martin a call to become the resident minister of our Society for the ensuing year, and to state the reasons that have moved us to such a course, irrespective of the action that Mr. Martin might take in regard to the call.

Our Society was organized nearly five years ago and has grown and prospered as well perhaps as could be expected under the unfavorable circumstances of having no resident minister and no abiding place of our own. The degree of success already attained gives us confidence in the belief that if one or both of those adverse circumstances be removed, the apparent bar to our complete and permanent organization for the furtherance of the cause of free religion will be broken. We have made several costly and futile efforts to obtain a leader satisfactory to our members and friends and have become convinced that Mr. Mar-

tin is the only one qualified to solidify our Society into such a coherent and potential body as the First Free Church of Tacoma. We feel assured that after nearly eleven years of organized existence the members of your church have become so attached to our common cause and are so desirous for its successful extension that they will forgive us for seeking to deprive them in a large degree of the services of Mr. Martin for the ensuing year.

Mr. Martin has informed one of our Trustees of his having secured the promise of an able gentleman in the east to assist him in his work in Seattle and Tacoma, and while it is doubtless his desire to see such an assistant carry on the work in Seattle, we feel certain from conditions long observed to exist in our Society that it will be disastrous to attempt at this time to reconcile our people to any other leader than Mr. Martin, and we hope that you will so sympathize with us in our efforts to establish our movement permanently in Seattle as not to regard this act of our board of trustees as a selfish one or as unjustified in the premises. We have urged upon Mr. Martin that your church, by reason of its superior organization can better withstand the installation of a new minister for a time, and we cannot but feel that Mr. Martin *must* recognize the truth of our contention. We do not *know* how this matter will be considered by him, but we feel that whatever his decision might be, it is incumbent upon us to give you our views in the premises and to inform you of our action. With sincerest regards, we remain,

Yours very truly,

R. R. George,
Leo Kohn,
Griffith Davies,
Committee from Board of Trustees.

MR. ROBERTS' LETTER.

We devote the opening pages of this number to the letter written by Mr. J. W. Roberts, recently a minister of the Unitarian church, at Ayer, Mass. This letter deserves careful read-

ing by every one interested in our movement, for it is a noble combination of frankness and kindliness of spirit, of clear-cut thinking and honest, straightforward expression of inmost convictions. Such a letter, we believe, could be written only by one who is sincere to the core, and utterly consecrated to his chosen calling. All that we know of Mr. Roberts confirms this belief and we rejoice in the prospect of his fellowship and co-operation.

MR. MARTIN'S RESIGNATION.

At a meeting of the board of trustees of the First Free Church held September 21st, Mr. Martin presented his resignation as minister of the Society on the ground that he felt the time had come when his unmistakable duty is to develop and establish the work which he started five years ago in Seattle. He held that if the movement is to spread, as we believe it deserves to, he must do more than make a weekly visit of an hour, delivering a discourse; he must reside in Seattle and devote all his time and energy to building up the Society there. Having found in Mr. Roberts a man well fitted to serve as his successor in Tacoma, Mr. Martin felt fully justified in resigning at this time and accepting the call extended him by the Seattle Society. The board of trustees discussed the question of his departure in all its phases for over three hours, when it was voted to recommend to the congregation the acceptance of Mr. Martin's resignation and the extension to Mr. Roberts of an invitation to preach not for two or three Sundays, but for six months in order that both he and the people may have ample opportunity for mutual understanding and appreciation before entering upon a more extended engagement. It is expected that Mr. Roberts will begin his services on the first Sunday of October, and we confidently anticipate a speedy mutual adaptation on the part of minister and people to the requirements of the necessitated change. In our next number we hope to give our readers further details and also to publish Mr. Roberts' inaugural discourse.

GIFT TO MR. R. T. REID.

The Sunday services at the Tacoma theatre were closed for the vacation on June 14th. Immediately after the discourse, President Snell, of the board of trustees, on behalf of the congregation presented Mr. R. T. Reid, ex-treasurer of the church, with a handsome plush jewelry-case containing an inlaid gold locket, a pair of gold enameled cuff-links and a gold pocket pencil. In his presentation speech Dr. Snell made particular mention of the universally felt appreciation of Mr. Reid's services to the Society and the genuine regret, felt by all, over his departure from Tacoma. In responding, Mr. Reid with characteristic modesty made it appear that the Society was but slightly indebted to him and that as treasurer he had simply done his part like any other member of the Society. Very feelingly he maintained that the church had done vastly more for him than he was ever able to do for the church and that his one regret was that he had really done so little. In leaving the Tacoma managership of the Western Union Telegraph Company to assume a most responsible position with the American District Telegraph Company, Mr. Reid attains a richly deserved promotion over which every one who knows him will rejoice. Besides the business ability and integrity, the conscientiousness and fidelity that were the steps by which he gained his present important post, Mr. Reid will always be admiringly remembered for his unusual thoughtfulness and tact in meeting all sorts and conditions of men, his singular tenderness in dealing with the aged or the infirm, as they came to him with business or church affairs, his never-failing readiness to serve in any capacity, in which his versatile powers could be used, his remarkable genius for devising ways and means to eliminate church debts and the unflagging zeal and consecration with which he gave himself to furthering the interests of the church. Wherever he may go he will be certain to do good missionary work for the cause of Universal Religion, not only in words but by deeds, for of him it may truly be said, his life is the expression of his religion.

THE "MEMORABLE PETITION" AGAIN.

Our readers will recall the noble attempt of Rev. Charles F. Dole, of the Unitarian church, at Jamaica Plain, Mass., to widen the fellowship of Unitarianism so as to include the Free churches of Tacoma and Seattle, and all similar Societies in sympathy with the liberal spirit and humanitarian aims of the denomination. His petition having been duly presented to the directors of the American Unitarian Association was referred to the committee having in charge the publication of the annual "Year Book," which contains the list of Unitarian churches and ministers. This committee did not think favorably of Mr. Dole's petition, to have the name of the Year-book changed from "The Year Book of Unitarian Churches," to "The Year Book of Unitarian and Affiliated Churches," and to have therein published a separate list of such Free churches and ministers, not Unitarian, as wished to be included because of their sympathy with the general aims and spirit of Unitarianism. This committee did not look with favor on Mr. Dole's petition, nevertheless it was brought up at the annual meeting of the A. U. A., at Tremont Temple in Boston, last May. Here the question was presented, discussed and finally voted upon. It was decided by a vote of 76 to 72 not to publish a separate list of independent churches and ministers, but merely to change the name of the Year-book, adding the words "and affiliated churches" to the name "Unitarian," on the title page and cover. The entire discussion was reported verbatim and published in the *Christian Register* of the following week. To be sure the decision *not* to publish the separate list devitalized and practically nullified Mr. Dole's proposition, for no ministers or members of Free churches, with any regard for consistency and clearness and honor would be willing to be registered in a "Year Book of Unitarian and Affiliated Churches," without an explicit supplementary statement which would clearly differentiate them from the Unitarian position as stated in that same book. In all probability the eliminated section of Mr. Dole's petition will never again be restored. Most unlikely it is that the A. U. A. will ever broaden its basis of fellow-

ship so as to strip it of its exclusiveness and give place to those churches and ministers who, while avowedly independent of Unitarianism and all other sectarian organizations, yet feel in sympathy with that "profunder Unitarianism" which the fathers, (Channing, Parker and Emerson) championed, but which the children, in national assembly, have abjured. Nor, on the other hand, do we think it would be wise for the Tacoma church to renew the request for Unitarian fellowship. We feel convinced, on maturer reflection, that had our original petition, of 1893, or Mr. Dole's of 1903, been granted, it would in some measure have compromised our free position and tended to blur a distinction which it is of the utmost importance to keep clear, namely, that we stand for "the religion of Universal Man" rather than for "the religion of Jesus" as does Unitarianism, and never so much so as now. For President Eliot, of the A. U. A., has issued a letter to the Unitarian churches, suggesting that in their local "covenants" or "statement of belief" or "bond of union," they incorporate that portion of the national Unitarian constitution which reads, "these churches accept the religion of Jesus, holding in accordance with his teaching that practical religion is summed up in love to God and love to man." This lifts the national Unitarian statement to the level of a creed, producing once more a situation such as Channing so deeply deplored when he wrote "the Unitarian movement has pledged itself to progress as its aim and end and now we have a Unitarian Orthodoxy." We say all this in no unkind or carping spirit, but only in the interest of history, progress, fellowship and truth and with the ardent hope that the day of broader catholicity and religious union is really nearer than it seems.